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SUBJECT: FRF COALITION DISCUSSIONS A "DOGFIGHT"

REF: TOKYO 2868

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION JAMES P. ZUMWALT, REASONS 1.4(B)
AND (D)

11. (C) Summary: The discussion within the Japanese coalition government over the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) is a "dogfight" with no input from the Japanese bureaucracy, MOFA North American Affairs Bureau Deputy Director General Koji Tomita told Political Minister-Counselor 16 December. The leadership has not provided clear direction to the working level, according to Tomita, who further noted that none of the senior bureaucracy had received a readout of FM Okada's 15 December meetings with the Ambassador. Both Tomita and U.S.-Japan Security Treaty Division Director Takahiro Funakoshi emphasized it was important for the United States to remain firm in our position on FRF in order to avoid misinterpretation by the Japanese government and media. In spite of this, Tomita was skeptical about the prospects for FRF success as the plan stands today. Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty will be important for the Alliance, although some within the Japanese government may seek to co-opt the occasion in an attempt to revise the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) or negotiate for reductions in Host Nation Support (HNS). End Summary.

Coalition FRF Discussions: "Dogfight" (but for nothing)

12. (C) Tomita described the cabinet-level discussion on FRF as a "dogfight," but one that was occurring without input from the Japanese bureaucracy. MOFA officials have yet to receive direction on how to proceed on FRF discussions in the coming months, Tomita bemoaned, adding that the next steps in the process "need clarification" by the political leadership. There is a "common understanding" between Hatoyama and Okada, but it is unclear to the working level how the leadership intended to implement FRF.

13. (C) Funakoshi concurred with Tomita's assessment, but was frustrated that the cabinet dogfight was "for nothing" and the government is "trying to decide not to decide" by pushing the date for a response into next year. Both expressed frustration with Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirano, noting he was failing in his responsibility to give the coalition a cohesive structure and get the entire cabinet, especially SDP President Fukushima, on board with the agreed upon timeline.

Misunderstanding of the U.S. Position?

¶4. (C) Funakoshi stressed that the United States must remain firm in its stance that FRF is the best and only viable option and avoid creating an impression that there might be room for negotiation. The State Department's 15 December Daily Press Briefing was misinterpreted in some Japanese media reports as indicating that U.S. acquiescence to the GOJ's delay indicated that there might be some willingness to renegotiate Futenma. Funakoshi further noted it was important for both the United States and Japan to counter reports in the Japanese media calling the current situation a "crisis." The firmer the United States stays on FRF, the smoother the process will be, Funakoshi advised.

Prospects for FRF Success?

¶5. (C) Noting that by May 2010 the GOJ will have enacted the JFY2010 budget and other important legislation, Tomita said the DPJ would have substantially less need for the coalition to remain together. He said, though, that he was skeptical that the government would endorse the FRF plan in its current state. He also noted that if the government mishandles the FRF discussions, it will have a negative impact in the July 2010 Upper House elections, running the risk of the DPJ not able to achieve majority control in both chambers of the Diet.

50th Anniversary: Celebrate but be Cautious

¶6. (C) Tomita agreed that it was important to shift the bilateral discussion to focus on other issues and said FM Okada was supportive of celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of the Alliance. It would be important to focus the celebrations around the theme of common strategic objectives, he added. Tomita emphasized, however, that the celebration agenda could be "hijacked" by those in the Japanese government and media who believe the 50th Anniversary should be used as an opportunity to revise the SOFA or discuss reductions in HNS. The U.S. and Japan should keep their statements short and "punchy" and should suggest a very positive agenda making utmost efforts to avoid any efforts on the part of those who would attempt to exploit the process, Tomita cautioned. Both Tomita and Funakoshi cited recent examples of Japanese Communist Party involvement in GOJ meetings, including a base affairs-related meeting late last week, and noted this was a possible indication of left-leaning elements in the DPJ gaining increased sway in policy discussions.

Comment

¶7. (C) While our meeting was a good opportunity to share views on the recent Hatoyama government's announcement of a delay in a decision on FRF, the tone of the discussion and the body language of our counterparts (Tomita in particular) was further confirmation of what we've heard from all quarters of the bureaucracy - a growing frustration with being cut out of major policy discussions. The frustration was particularly evident when Funakoshi asked for the Embassy to seek U.S. notetaker presence in senior-level meetings in order to justify similar participation for MOFA. Further seeking to ensure that MOFA remains involved in policy discussions, in addition to the Ambassador's discussions with FM Okada and Hatoyama, Funakoshi asked for the United States to use MOFA N.A. Affairs Bureau DG Umemoto to deliver messages to the GOJ.
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